Something Special: U.S. SOCOM Continues to Modernize Its Fleet of Smaller Surface Craft

Officials ride a combatant craft-assault (CCA) boat three years ago during a U.S. Special Operations Command Central demonstration. The CCA is the first craft to modernize the special boat squadrons. DEFENSE DEPARTMENT

Just as “Big Navy” is conducting programs to modernize its battle fleet, one of its fleets of small boats has been going through a substantial modernization: the small surface craft that support special operations forces (SOF), in particular the Navy’s SEALs and Marine Raiders in their clandestine operations.

The SEALs use special operations craft, operated by special warfare combatant craft operators, to approach shores and insert and extract teams of special warfare operators. These craft are fast, quiet, capable of shallow-water operations, and armed with machine guns for use if their cover is blown. The small craft also can be used for coastal patrol missions and to interdict hostile craft and conduct visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS) missions.

Check out the digital edition of the September *Seapower* magazine and other past issues here.

Navy Special Warfare Command, the parent unit of the SEAL teams, as a component of U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM), receives much of its equipment not through normal service acquisition channels but through SOCOM. SOCOM is a combatant command but is unusual in that it has its own acquisition budget and programs.

Special Warfare Small Boat Recapitalization Well Underway

During a May webinar, the vSOFIC (Virtual Special Operations Forces Industry Conference), Special Operations Command provided an unusual look into the acquisition programs of its naval craft and showed the special warfare community nearing completion of recapitalization of two classes of small boats and well along in a modernization program that will increase the capabilities of its special operations craft.

The Navy's special operations boat capabilities and capacity has expanded greatly over a decade ago, when the special boat squadrons operated the Mark V special operations craft, the Naval Special Warfare Rigid-Hull Inflatable Boat and the Special Operations Craft-Riverine (SOC-R).

> *The CCA "is a great workhorse. It's small enough, modular [and] easy to move around a theater, which is a great attribute for SOF craft."*
>
> *Capt. Rocky Russell, Special Operations Command program manager for surface systems*

The aluminum-hull, 33-foot-long SOC-R, built by U.S. Marine Inc. (USMI), is designed for short-range insertion and extraction of SOF in riverine and littoral environments. The 40-plus-knot craft, heavily armed with machine guns, carries a crew of four as well as eight SOF personnel.

"At any given time, we've got 12 that are in training or in deployment rotations," said Capt. Katherine Dolloff, who leads the Special Operations Command's program executive office for maritime. "We've got 12 that are in lay-up. This is our only riverine capability."

"It's a great hull," said Capt. Rocky Russell, Dolloff's program manager for surface systems. "It's aging. We're working on the sustainment. We're starting to think about the

serious design effort on what the next-generation craft should look like."

Craft to replace the Mark V boats are well established.

"The program for the Mark V special operations craft ended in 2013 as next-generation craft were being procured to replace the legacy craft," said Lt. Cmdr. Tim Hawkins, a SOCOM spokesman.

Special warfare combatant-craft crewmen in a special operations craft-riverine, built by U.S. Marine Inc., conduct drills at the riverine training range at Fort Knox, Kentucky. U.S. NAVY / Petty Officer 1st Class Kathryn Whittenberger

The first craft to modernize the special boat squadrons is the combatant craft-assault, built by USMI. The 41-foot combatant craft-assault (CCA) is a low-observable, composite material, medium-range boat that provides expanded range, payload and speed over similar-sized special warfare craft such as 11-meter rigid-hull inflatable boats. The CCA is equipped with a small mast with a surface search radar, electro-optical/infrared sensor and satellite communications. It also can be airdropped from a C-17 transport aircraft.

Seven-Year Road for a 'Workhorse'

Development of the CCA began by 2010 and the first boat was delivered 2013. Full operational capability was reached in 2017 with 32 CCAs fielded.

"This is a great workhorse," Russell said. "It's small enough, modular [and] easy to move around a theater, which is a great attribute for SOF craft. [It] can carry squad-size elements. It's great for the VBSS mission and getting operators where they need to go. … We're heavily employed overseas, doing great things."

"We did just award a new [five-year] production contract with

USMI, which will both add to the [CCA] fleet and replace aging craft," Dolloff said.

Russell said the CCA design is "stable in the hull form, but we're actually working on some major modifications, one of them being a new mast to incorporate the CC FLIR II [Combatant Craft Forward-Looking Infrared II] and a new comms box setup that help us have more modular, adaptable configuration for bringing systems on and off the CCA as technology evolves and mission needs evolve as well."

This year, SOCOM will field the last of the current production run of the main replacement for the 82-foot-long Mark V, the combatant craft-medium (CCM) Mk1, built by Vigor Works. The CCM is a 60-foot fast craft designed to be clandestine, agile, and adaptive and that can insert and extract SOF in a medium threat environment. The CCM is small enough to be carried inside a C-17 transport aircraft, a large advantage over the legacy Mark V, which required the larger C-5 transport for movement.

U.S. Navy Special Boat Team operators assigned to Special Warfare Command transit with Hellenic Navy operators through various locations near Greece in July. The team operated their combatant craft-medium during the engagement. U.S. ARMY / Sgt. Aven Santiago

The CCM was ordered in 2014 under an indefinite quantity contract. A total of 30 had been ordered as of 2020. Initial operational capability was achieved in fiscal 2015, and full operational capability is in track by the end of fiscal 2020.

"We've got 27 of 30 craft fielded [as of May 2020]," SOCOM's Dolloff said.

"The CCM has been on a deployment cycle," Russell added. "It's done many things down range. There has been a big learning curve for us on a craft like this. It's not quite as large as the Mark V, but it comes with a lot of different aspects that

make it suited for today's environment."

"As pleased as the operators are with the CCM, SOCOM is focused on bringing a lot of things to CCM," Russell said. "One of those is maritime precision engagement. We're going to see a topside configuration change with the integration of CC FLIR II."

Maritime precision engagement is envisioned to be "a standoff, loitering, man-in-the-loop weapon for combatant craft capable of targeting individuals, groups, vehicles [and] small oceangoing craft with low collateral damage," he said, noting that the installation would involve craft alterations, launchers, and missiles.

Russell said the maritime precision engagement was a "very difficult challenge for the SWAP [size, weight and power] conditions on CCM to get it integrated smoothly."

The CC FLIR II, built by FLIR Systems, is a "big upgrade from our legacy maritime FLIR," Russell said. It is used to detect, recognize, identify, range, track and highlight objects of interest.

"It is in production and actually going on the craft," he said, noting that as of May, 21 of 58 ordered had been delivered. Initial operational capability was achieved in fiscal 2018. Full operational capability is scheduled for fiscal 2024.

Another plus for the CCM is Maritime Tactical Mission Networking, nicknamed "Mountain Man." This is being added to "give this boat much more connectivity to prove utility to offboard partners and bring situational awareness to the crew and whatever ground force we are carrying," Russell said.

The program office also is working to install a retractable .50-caliber Mk50 machine gun system that retracts into the bow of the CCM.

Large, Stealthy, Exotic SEALION Gains Favor

The largest craft in the Navy Special Warfare Command's fleet is the combatant craft-heavy (CCH) Mk1, which also is the most exotic and stealthy.

Known as the SEALION, for SEAL Insertion, Observation and Neutralization, the 40-ton, 80-foot low-profile craft built by Vigor Works, could be described as a semisubmersible. It has retractable masts for sensors and communications. Jet Skis, inflatable rubber raiding craft and diving equipment can be carried and launched out the stern. The SEALION also can be transported inside a C-17 aircraft. SEALION is based on an earlier prototype, the Alligator, which has been transferred to Israel, according to one report.

The Navy developed two as demonstrators, SEALION 1 and SEALION 2, and SOCOM was able to turn them into operational craft, Dolloff said. "One is forward deployed at any given time, … focused on national-level missions."

The largest craft in Special Warfare Command's fleet is the combatant craft-heavy, or SEALION – for SEAL insertion, observation and neutralization. The 40-ton, 80-foot low-profile craft, built by Vigor Works, is semi-submersible.
NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE COMMAND
The first two SEALIONs entered service with SOCOM in 2014.

"It's a great craft," Russell said. "Low numbers [in service], but it can do things that other craft can't."

A third SEALION is being built at Vigor. In June 2017, the company was awarded a $17 million contract for SEALION 3, which is designed based on the lessons learned from operation of the first two SEALIONs. Delivery is expected in 2021.

"We're really excited to get SEALION 3 into the force," Russell said. "That should be in early calendar 2022."

In March 2019, SOCOM held a capability collaboration event to assess a CCH Mk2, a well-deck-capable, diesel-powered boat capable of crossing the ocean and delivering and extracting SOF and launching and recovering small unmanned surface and underwater vessels. But SOCOM is not actively pursuing that program, Russell said.

Surface Warfare Director: SPY-6 Radar Back-Fit to Flight II DDGs 'A Few Years Out'

ARLINGTON, Va. – The surface warfare director in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) said the back-fit of the new SPY-6 radar in the Flight II Arleigh Burke guided-missile destroyer (DDG) is a "few years out."

Speaking Aug. 27 in the Surface Navy Association's First Waterfront Symposium webinar ships, Rear Adm. Paul Schlise, director, Surface Warfare, said the new SPY-6 Air and Missile Defense Radar is on track to be installed on the first Flight III DDG, which he said is 36% complete.

The Flight III is designed to have the SPY-6 installed from the start, but the Navy also plans to back-fit some Flight II DDGs with the Raytheon-built radar.

Schlise said the SPY-6 back-fit will begin with the later Flight II DDG modernizations.

"[The back-fit] has some requirements process to go through

here in the [Pentagon],” he said. “As with everything we do at the OPNAV staff, it gets stacked against all the other priorities across all the [warfare directors].”

“The great news is that the radar is continuing to perform well,” he said. “The elements are [being delivered] on time and the testing is tracking along. The back-fit has got a ways to go in terms of the point at which we cut them in, which is a few years out, into the DDG Mod program, but it’s on track.”

The admiral said he is “happy to say [that the SPY-6] has been a real success story in terms of development,” he said. “The capability is fantastic; the testing is tracking.”

Navy Announces 3 Flag Assignments

ARLINGTON, Va. — The secretary of the Navy and chief of naval operations announced the following assignments in an Aug. 28 Defense Department release:

Rear Adm. Collin P. Green will be assigned as chief of staff, U.S. Special Operations Command, Tampa, Florida. Green is currently serving as commander, Naval Special Warfare Command, San Diego, California.

Rear Adm. John F. Wade will be assigned as director of operations, J3, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Camp H. M. Smith, Hawaii. Wade is currently serving as director, maritime operations, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia.

Rear Adm. Fred I. Pyle will be assigned as director, maritime

operations, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia. Pyle is currently serving as commander, Navy Warfare Development Command, Norfolk, Virginia.

Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton Returns Home after 60-Day Patrol

A Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton crew interdicts a go-fast vessel in the Eastern Pacific Ocean, August 19, 2020. U.S. COAST GUARD

CHARLESTON, S.C. – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton (WMSL-753) returned home Friday to Charleston after completing a 60-day patrol throughout the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Coast Guard 7th District said in an Aug. 28 release.

The crew offloaded $228 million worth of cocaine and marijuana Thursday at Port Everglades.

Hamilton's crew interdicted nine drug-laden vessels while patrolling the Eastern Pacific Ocean. Described as "go-fast" vessels, they intentionally travel at high speeds trying to avoid interdiction. Hamilton's law enforcement team detained all 25 suspects, transferred six others and handed them all over to Federal authorities for potential prosecution.

During one of the interdictions, Hamilton's crew worked alongside the USS Nitze, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer homeported in Norfolk, Virginia to interdict a go-fast vessel 76 miles South of Panama. The Nitze deployed with a Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachment Team which enables Navy ships

to conduct counter-drug operations and enforce U.S. laws. Nitze launched their MH-60 Seahawk helicopter to provide airborne support and disable the vessel while Hamilton's boarding team conducted the law enforcement boarding. The teamwork between Nitze and Hamilton led to the seizure of 1,500 kilograms of cocaine and apprehension of three suspected drug smugglers.

"We are proud to support the President's national security strategy by keeping illegal drugs off American streets. Our efforts also degrade transnational criminal organizations, bring stability to Central America, and increase interoperability with our partner nations," said Capt. Timothy Cronin, commanding officer of Hamilton. "I am extremely proud of this crew how they managed to sail short-handed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and still deliver tremendous results."

The Coast Guard Cutter Hamilton is one of two 418-foot National Security Cutters (NSC) homeported in Charleston. With its robust command, control, communication, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance equipment, the NSC is the most technologically advanced ship in the Coast Guard's fleet. NSCs are equipped with three state-of-the-art small boats and a stern boat launch system, dual aviation facilities, and serve as an afloat command and control platform for complex law enforcement and national security missions involving the Coast Guard and numerous partner agencies.

Hamilton's crew, along with an aviation detachment from the Coast Guard's Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron, began her deployment in early July as part of a partnership falling under Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) South, a component of U.S. Southern Command. JIATF South, located in Key West, oversees the detection and monitoring of illicit traffickers and assists U.S. and multi-national law enforcement agencies with the interdiction of these activities.

Expeditionary Warfare Director: Marines Will Be Sinking Ships in Future War

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Marine general assigned to the Navy as its director of expeditionary warfare says that Marine Corps forces will be more in support of the Navy than being the supported force.

“We’re going to have Marines out there sinking ships,” said Maj. Gen. Tracy W. King, director, Expeditionary Warfare, speaking Aug. 27 in the Surface Navy Association’s First Waterfront Symposium webinar.

King was referring to the Marine Corps’ plans to acquire anti-ship missiles such as the Naval Strike Missile to stage at expeditionary bases and engage enemy naval vessels with those precision weapons in what the Corps calls Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.

“Per the commandant’s [Gen. David Berger’s] guidance, we need to be an extension of the fleet,” King said. “It’s not, ‘What can the Navy do for the Marine Corps?’ It’s the exact opposite. If you just think of some of the missions that the Navy is going to have to do when she gets in close: fast FIAC [fast inshore attack craft] comes to mind. The Marine Corps can really help with [countering] that. If you get a Cobra [attack helicopter] on you, you are not getting away.

“Our examination of the coming fight is that it is going to begin in a very distributed fashion,” King said. “If we do come to blows with China, it’s going to be very confused for the first 30 or 45 days, but we must fight in a distributed

fashion. … It’s simply harder.”

King said that “one of the things the American joint force does much better than its potential adversaries is that we don’t culminate … because of our logistic tails. If we have to distribute across an archipelago or wherever, that’s going to become increasingly difficult, as is command and control.

“The Marine Corps’ ability to project power over the shore stems directly from its relationship with the Navy,” he said. “That’s our center of gravity. What the Navy and Marine Corps team provides the Joint Force is the ability to do it at a time and place of our choosing, to use the oceans as maneuver space.”

King said that distributed maritime operations “have all the benefits of mass absent the risks of concentration. … That is going to be extremely difficult for our adversary to counter. We have to mess up the calculus of our adversaries. Being able to distribute and maintain the lethality that comes with the U.S. Joint Force is something we have not done normally. We normally concentrate to do that, and we don’t want to do that in the coming fight with China.”

King pointed to the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) being developed by the Navy as a key tool in achieving distributed maritime operations. He said the LAW is not meant to replace the large amphibious warfare ships currently in the fleet but is meant to enhance the ability of the fleet to conduct distributed operations.

“The LAW is going to be a lily pad that carries excess fuel, that can make water, that Marines can actually live on,” he said. “I see them as part of the crew.”

Regarding the larger amphibious warfare ships in the fleet, King said they need increased lethality, particularly the San Antonio-class amphibious platform dock ships.

“We owe that to our Sailors and to our Marines. We’re working on that as well.”

King said the Navy and Marine Corps will continue to deploy amphibious ready groups with Marine expeditionary units embarked as a “force of presence, not a force to take into high-end combat.”

Navy Taps FlightSafety Services Corp. for New Training Helicopters Instruction

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy has selected a Denver-based aviation training company to provide ground instruction for the Navy’s new TH-73A training helicopter.

The Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division in Orlando, Florida, awarded FlightSafety Services Corp. a $221 million firm, fixed-price, indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity contract for “aircrew training services for the TH-73A Advanced Helicopter Training System to include flight training devices (FTDs) and classroom instruction to train student naval aviators (SNAs) to the standards necessary to meet an annual pilot production rate of over 600 advanced rotary wing and intermediate tilt-rotor SNAs,” the Aug. 25 Defense Department contract said.

The contract also provides for the operation and maintenance of the flight training devices for the TH-73A.

In January, the Navy selected the Leonardo TH-73A helicopter to replace its TH-57B/C Sea Ranger training helicopters. The TH-73A is based on the company's TH-119 design. Leonardo has been awarded a $176.5 million contract to build 32 TH-73As for the initial batch and also to provide initial spares, support and dedicated equipment and specific pilot and maintenance training services, Leonardo said in a release.

FlightSafety's work will be performed in Milton, Florida, site of the Navy's helicopter training base. The work is expected to be completed in June 2026.

RMC Admiral: Not Enough Ship Repair Capacity for Peacetime, Let Alone Wartime

The USS Bonhomme Richard sits pierside at Naval Base San Diego on July 16 after four days of fire that devastated the amphibious assault ship. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communications Specialist 3rd Class Jason Waite

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy's regional maintenance centers said the Navy, as currently resourced, is not able to keep up with the ship repair demands of the current fleet and would have greater challenges in keeping up in wartime.

"We don't have enough capacity for peacetime," said Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander, regional maintenance centers, and director of surface ship maintenance and modernization for Naval Sea Systems Command, speaking at an Aug. 25 webinar conducted by the Navy League of the United States and

sponsored by L3Harris Corp. and Tri-Tec.

“We have so much to be proud of, but we’re not as effective or efficient,” Ver Hage said. “We can’t get ships delivered on time with the predictability we need today.”

“Think about how long it took [the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers] Fitzgerald and McCain to get back in operation,” he said, referring to their respective collisions at sea in 2017. “We’ll see what we do with the [Wasp-class amphibious assault ship] Bonhomme Richard [which was devastated by fire in July], but that would be a massive effort to repair her, if that’s the decision. I’m talking years.”

The admiral said that developing the workforce needed to repair ships in both the public and private shipyards is critical to the repair industrial base.

He also stressed more discipline is needed in maintenance planning. He said that 50% to 55% of every ship repair availability should be planned in advance and that port loading projection needs to be scrutinized constantly to optimize the flow of ships in and out of maintenance. A positive development is that the fleets are increasingly cognizant of the importance of level-loading the maintenance ports for the ship availabilities.

The admiral said that the increased use of distant support in the COVID-19 era has improved the resilience of the ship-repair efforts.

Ver Hage said that public-private investment is needed to have the industrial base needed to repair ships on time.

He said his command is trying to buy materials and components more deliberately and proactively.

The admiral said he is trying to simplify and reduce the diversity of systems, for example, steering and navigation

systems, so as to reduce the parts support and repair expertise needed. He also noted that software is increasingly more central to the testing of a component.

Also speaking in the webinar were Rear Adm. Tom J. Anderson, program executive officer-ships, and John Rhatigan, chairman of the Maritime Machinists Association. Bryan Clark, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, served as moderator.

PEO-Ships: 'No Shortage of Challenges' in Shipbuilding, Sustainment

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of U.S. Navy shipbuilding said there is no shortage of challenges in building the fleet and keeping it in fighting condition.

Speaking at an Aug. 25 webinar conducted by the Navy League of the United States and sponsored by L3Harris Corp. and Tri-Tec, Rear Adm. Tom J. Anderson, program executive officer-ships, listed the top challenges the Navy faced in optimizing the procurement and sustainment of ships.

At the top of his list are the capacity and capability of the industrial base in a time of change.

"What do we have today, what do we need for tomorrow, and how do we efficiently and effectively transition between the two," Anderson listed. "It's not an easy process to change, and we need to do it mindfully."

Shipyard workers watch last July as the upper bow unit of the

future aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy is fitted to the primary structure of the ship at Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding. U.S. NAVY / Huntington Ingalls Industries by Matt Hildreth

Anderson for one mentioned the supply chain, noting that "any plans we have going forward need to take into account their health and avoid the whipsaw that we do … to provide stable work to the industrial base."

Design technology maturity was the second concern that Anderson mentioned during the webinar.

"We need to use what's on the shelf and figure how best to apply to the requirements that we have," he said. "That's our fastest path to success. Where there is a requirement that can't be met today, we need to think through how we develop and mature it in a way that allows it to be produced efficiently without the need for going back and making significant changes while we are constructing [a ship]."

"For ships and ship systems which are a little unique, that can mean some form of land-based testing," he said. "How do we get the risk out of that platform before going into the production run and we get to that smooth and efficient production that we need?"

Timing of new starts in ship construction is another consideration, Anderson said, interspersed with stable production lines.

"We can't go change the entire force structure at one time," he said. "We don't have the capability, so what is our programmatic and production bandwidth for new starts? How much can we do concurrently? We need to take into account the expertise both in the Navy and in industry when it comes to new starts, and at the same time we need to account for transition between the production."

Anderson also stressed that stability in the Navy's

shipbuilding plan is important, noting that “uncertainty has multiple negative impacts to cost and schedule.”

“Significant production runs are more cost-effective in the acquisition of a vessel,” he added. “We need to be looking at what the long game is with regard to when we determine we’re going to build a platform, how long we’re going to build it for. Efficiency comes as a result of repetition.”

Also speaking in the webinar were Rear Adm. Eric Ver Hage, commander of the Regional Maintenance Centers, and director, surface ship maintenance and modernization, and John Rhatigan, chairman of the Maritime Machinists Association. Bryan Clark, senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, served as moderator.

Three Mine Countermeasures Ships Set for Decommissioning

Special Warfare Boat Operator 1st Class Nick Fajardo, a member of the U.S. Navy Parachute Team, the Leap Frogs, comes in for a landing during the decommissioning ceremony of the mine countermeasure ship USS Champion on Aug. 18. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Kevin C. Leitner

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy will decommission three of its Avenger-class mine countermeasures ships over the next few days, commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CNSFP) said in an August 20 release.

The USS Champion, the USS Scout and the USS Ardent officially will be decommissioned at Naval Base San Diego on Aug. 25, Aug. 26 and Aug. 27, respectively. Their

retirements will leave eight MCMs remaining in service, forward deployed to Sasebo, Japan, and Manama, Bahrain. Ceremonies marking their retirements were held this week.

“Due to public health safety and restrictions of large public events related to the novel coronavirus … pandemic, the ceremonies were virtually celebrated with ship plank owners and former crew members,” according to CNSFP.

The 14 Avenger-class MCMS were part of the naval build-up of the 1980s. The MCMs were “designed as mine sweepers/hunter-killers capable of finding, classifying, and destroying moored and bottom mines,” the CNSFP release said.

“These ships use sonar and video systems, cable cutters, and a mine-detonating device that can be released and detonated by remote control. They are also capable of conventional sweeping measures. The ships are fiberglass sheathed, wooden hull construction.”

Three MCMs preceded their sister ships into retirement: The Avenger was decommissioned on Sept. 30, 2014, followed by the Defender on Oct. 1, 2014; the Guardian left service in 2013 after being grounded near the Philippines.

“Champion, Scout and Ardent Sailors, past and present, are a special breed,” said Vice Adm. Roy Kitchener, commander, Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, said at the Scout’s ceremonies.

“These Sailors served with distinct pride and dedicated tremendous energy in representing the U.S. Navy’s mine-sweeping community over the lifespan of these unique ships. As this chapter comes to a close, we look back proudly on the efforts of these Iron Sailors, their families and these tested and proven wooden ships as they all played an important

role in the defense of our nation and maritime freedom around the globe.”

The following brief histories of the ships were provided by CNSFP:

The Champion was built in Marinette, Wisconsin, by Marinette Marine Corp. and commissioned on Feb. 8, 1991. Originally assigned to active Naval Reserve, Mine Countermeasures Squadron 2, the Champion spent most of its years homeported in either Ingleside, Texas, or San Diego. Since 2000, the Champion has operated exclusively in the Gulf of Mexico and Pacific Coast. Its stateside presence allowed for continuous improvement of mine-warfare technologies and crew training for forward-deployed naval forces in Bahrain and Japan.

The fourth ship to bear the name, the Scout was laid down on June 8, 1987, at Peterson Builders in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. It was launched on May 20, 1989, and commissioned on Dec. 15, 1990. Among the Scout’s achievements were helping to evacuate refugees from Kosovo in 1999, supporting Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, and joining Hurricane Katrina relief operations in 2005.

USS Ardent was commissioned on Feb. 8, 1994. In 1998, in the North Arabian Gulf, the Ardent received emergent tasking to assist USNS Catawba in locating and recovering a downed F/A-18C. Later that year, it conducted operations inside Iraqi territorial waters in Mine Danger Area (MDA) 10 in support of Operation Desert Fox. The Ardent departed on an emergency sortie from Mina Salman Port, with all other ships, in the wake of USS Cole bombing in Port of Aden, Yemen, in October 2000.

Navy Maturing Next-Generation Air Dominance Acquisition Approach

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has acknowledged that it has stood up a program office for the Next-Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program and is maturing the acquisition approach for the carrier-based power projection concept.

The Navy has taken a go-slow approach to acknowledging the existence of the NGAD program office, given its highly classified nature. *Seapower* sent a query on June 10 to the Program Executive Office for Tactical Aircraft Programs (PEO(T)), but the Navy did not make a statement until two months later.

During an Aug. 12 teleconference with reporters with James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, responding to a question from *Seapower,* confirmed that the program office has been established. Guerts said the program was in its early stages and that the Navy and U.S. Air Force are working to avoid duplicating each other's efforts.

On Aug. 17, PEO(T) responded to *Seapower*'s original query with a statement: "As part of the Navy's commitment to building a more lethal force, the Next-Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) Program Office (PMA-230) has been established under the Program Executive Office for Tactical Aircraft Programs (PEO(T)).

"PMA-230 was established on May 7, 2020, by the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition per SECNAV's [secretary of the Navy's] and CNO's [chief of naval operations'] direction to develop the next generation air dominance capabilities that will provide

advanced carrier-based power projection capabilities that operate in advanced anti-access/area denial threat environments," the statement said. "The capabilities being pursued are informed by the Navy's NGAD Analysis of Alternatives."

PEO(T) added on Aug. 19 that, "We are currently maturing the NGAD acquisition approach to support the NGAD Program Office activities.

Capt. Albert Mousseau Jr. is the program manager for PMA-230.